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*Published in:*  
Community, Work & Family

*DOI:*  
[10.1080/13668800902968907](https://doi.org/10.1080/13668800902968907)

**IMPORTANT NOTE: You are advised to consult the publisher's version (publisher's PDF) if you wish to cite from it. Please check the document version below.**

*Document Version*  
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

*Publication date:*  
2009

[Link to publication in University of Groningen/UMCG research database](#)

### *Citation for published version (APA):*

Peters, P., Dulk, L. D., & Lippe, T. V. D. (2009). The effects of time-spatial flexibility and new working conditions on employees' work-life balance. *Community, Work & Family*, 12(3), 279-298.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13668800902968907>

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## Community, Work & Family

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/title~content=t713412097>

### The effects of time-spatial flexibility and new working conditions on employees' work-life balance: the Dutch case

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**To cite this Article** Peters, Pascale , den Dulk, Laura and van der Lippe, Tanja(2009) 'The effects of time-spatial flexibility and new working conditions on employees' work-life balance: the Dutch case', Community, Work & Family, 12: 3, 279 – 297

**To link to this Article:** DOI: 10.1080/13668800902968907

**URL:** <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13668800902968907>

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## RESEARCH ARTICLE

### The effects of time-spatial flexibility and new working conditions on employees' work–life balance: the Dutch case

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(Received 30 June 2008; final version received 24 February 2009)

Part-time work, flexible working hours, and home-based teleworking are HR instruments which are used to facilitate reconciliation of work and family life. It can be questioned, however, whether these arrangements really enhance work–life balance. This paper examines whether time-spatial flexibility reduces negative work–home interference, and if so, whether this also holds true for the category of 'New Employees' working under so-called 'New Working Conditions' which are characterised by professional job autonomy, team working by project, management by objectives, and strict deadlines. Employing survey data collected in 2003 among 807 Dutch employees, it is concluded that time-spatial flexibility does affect the work–life balance of workers positively, also under New Working Conditions. Generally, employees holding a smaller part-time job (12–24 contractual working hours per week) experienced a better work–life balance. In particular, female workers gained from more control over the temporal location of their work. Home-based teleworkers and employees holding larger part-time jobs (25–35 hours per week) did not experience a better work–life balance. In the concluding section, the results of the study are discussed in the context of contemporary Dutch labour market developments.

**Keywords:** flexibility; post-Fordist work; HR policies; gender differences; labour market policies

Travail à temps partiel, horaires flexibles, et télétravail à domicile sont des instruments de gestion des ressources humaines qui sont utilisés réconcilier travail et vie de famille. On peut cependant se poser la question si ces arrangements améliorent réellement l'équilibre entre vie familiale et travail des employés qui sont soumis à aux «nouvelles conditions de travail» caractérisées par l'autonomie, le travail en équipe de projet, la gestion par objectifs et des délais stricts. Cet article cherche à savoir si la flexibilité spatio-temporelle réduit les interférences négatives en travail et vie familiale et si cela est également vrai en ce qui concerne les «nouvelles conditions de travail». Sur la base d'une enquête conduite en 2003 auprès de 807 employés hollandais, il est démontré que la flexibilité spatio-temporelle influence positivement l'équilibre travail–vie professionnelle des employés, de même que ceux qui sont soumis aux «nouvelles conditions de travail». De manière générale, les employés à travail à temps partiel qui travaillent moins (entre 12 et 24 heures de travail par semaine) ont un meilleur équilibre entre travail et vie familiale. Plus particulièrement, les femmes bénéficient plus d'avoir

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un contrôle sur leur temps et lieu de travail. Les télétravailleurs qui travaillent à la maison et les employés à temps partiel qui travaillent plus (entre 25 et 35 heures de travail par semaine) ne perçoivent aucune amélioration dans l'équilibre entre travail et vie professionnelle. L'article se conclut par une discussion des résultats de l'étude dans le contexte des développements actuels du marché du travail hollandais.

**Mots-clés:** flexibilité; travail post-Fordist; ressources humaines; genre; politique du marché du travail

## Introduction

Like in many other European countries, the strong rise in women's labour market participation in the Netherlands is running parallel with an increasing number of people who combine work and family life. In 2005, about 40% of Dutch persons aged 20–65 spent at least 12 hours per week in the labour market and at least 12 hours on unpaid work at home (Breedveld et al., 2006). The combination of labour market participation and running a family life appears not always to be unproblematic. Research shows that many Dutch employees have difficulties finding the right balance (Geurts, Taris, Demerouti, Dijkers, & Kompier, 2002). Consequently, more and more employees demand more time-spatial or *employee-friendly* flexibility (European Foundation for Living and Working Conditions, 2002; Fleetwood, 2007); that is, they demand more say over how much, when, and where they work (Cloin & Hermans, 2006). Examples of arrangements that offer such flexibility are voluntary part-time work, flexible working hours, and telehomeworking. *Employee-friendly* flexibility distinguishes itself from *employer-friendly* flexibility which is demanded from employees by employers and customers (Fleetwood, 2007). Examples of the latter are involuntary part-time work, temporal labour contracts, and unpredictable working hours. Employer-friendly flexibility has been a much debated issue. Especially in the 1980s and 1990s, in times of increased global competition and ever faster changing markets, employers viewed it as a solution to their problems caused by the rigid post-war labour markets (Fleetwood, 2007). From another perspective, however, it was expected to disturb employees' work-life balance. In some cases, however, the distinction between employer- and employee-friendly flexibility is not that straightforward. Flexible working hours, for example, can also be characterised as *neutral* (Fleetwood, 2007). In a tight labour market, employers can introduce flexible working hours in order to attract and retain scarce personnel. In that case, a *dual-agenda* or a *win-win situation* can be arrived at as this type of flexibility can have positive consequences for both employers and employees (Rapoport, Bailyn, Fletcher, & Pruitt, 2002).

In the course of time, the connotation of the concept of (time-spatial) flexibility has become much more positive, and it is increasingly associated with the concept of 'work-life balance' (Fleetwood, 2007). In fact, in the Dutch labour market literature, the use of time-spatial flexibility is often assumed to ease problems faced by employees combining work and family life (Cloin & Hermans, 2006). In the contemporary debate on the effectiveness of organisations' work-life policies, however, voices are heard stating that under particular working conditions time-spatial flexibility may have negative consequences for employees' work-life balance, and that it can also lead to more work-related stress in employees' private lives. Kossek, Lautsch, and Eaton (2005), for example, point out that flexibility leads to

blurred boundaries which make it less easy for employees to free themselves from work. In fact, time-spatial flexibility might make it easier to work overtime or to ponder over work during family or leisure time (cf. Mirchandani, 2000) and may hamper employees' functioning in the private domain (Dijkers, Geurts, Den Dulk, Peper, & Kompier, 2004). In particular, employees working under, what we call in this study, 'New Working Conditions', that is, those having higher levels of job autonomy, often performing team working by project, being managed by objectives, and often facing strict deadlines, may be vulnerable to these side effects of flexibility. An example of a branch in which these working conditions prevail is the service sector, including IT jobs, consultancy, and accountancy (cf. Lewis, 2007). In the literature, these New Working Conditions, controlling employees working in these firms, may be alternatively referred to as 'high performance work systems', 'post-industrial work', 'post-modern work', 'post-Fordist work', or 'New Ways to Work'. All these labels have in common that they relate to the profound and even 'revolutionary' socio-technical changes which have occurred with regard to the way modern firms direct the efforts of their employees. The consequences for these so-called 'New Employees', who increasingly demand more accountability, job autonomy and time-spatial flexibility not only in exchange for their time, but also for their skills, knowledge, willingness to invest in long life learning, flexibility, loyalty, and commitment, are just as variously denoted with phrases like 'employability', 'empowerment', and 'every worker a knowledge worker' (for an overview, see Smith, 1997; Van Echtelt, Glebbeek, Wielers, & Lindenberg, 2007). The 'New Working Conditions' of the 'New Employees', are, on the one hand, associated with more time-spatial flexibility, and, on the other, with an ongoing work intensification or time-greediness (Appelbaum, Bailey, Berg, & Kalleberg, 2000; De Korte & Bolweg, 1994; Fleetwood, 2007; Lewis & Smithson, 2006; Peters, 2000; Van Echtelt, 2007; Van Hoof, 2007). Telehomework, for example, is often viewed as 'double edged', as it has the potential to harmonise work and family life and to induce more overtime and a disturbed work-life balance (Peters & Van der Lippe, 2007).

On reflection, the relationship between time-spatial flexibility and work-life balance is more complex than may be expected. The impact of flexibility may depend on the type of work considered. Besides that, there may also be gender differences with regard to the motivation to use time-spatial flexibility, how it is used (Fouarge, Grim, Kerkhofs, Roman, & Wilthagen, 2004; Sullivan & Lewis, 2001) and with regard to its consequences. In order to get a better insight into the influence of the use of flexible work arrangements on the work-life conflict of Dutch employees, the present study aims to answer the following research question: *Does time-spatial flexibility indeed lead to a decrease of male and female Dutch employees' work-life conflict, and does this also hold true for employees working under New Working Conditions?*

## Theory and hypotheses

### *Work-family conflict*

In the scientific debate on work-life issues, much attention has been given to the conflict employees perceive when they combine their professional work and family lives, and the potential consequences it might have for their well-being, like stress,

health problems, burn-out, and underperformance (Allen, 2001; Allen, Herst, Bruck, & Sutton, 2000; Netemeyer, Boles, & McMurrian, 1996). Greenhaus and Beutell (1985), the founding fathers of work–family conflict theories, define work–home conflict as ‘a form of interrole conflict in which the role pressures from the work and family domains are mutually incompatible in some respect’ (p. 77). Their basic assumption is that time and energy to fulfil the roles in the work and private domains are scarce (Geurts et al., 2005). Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) distinguish between three major forms of role conflict (Dikkers et al., 2004, 2007; Geurts et al., 2005).

1. *Time-based conflict* refers to someone’s physical or psychological impossibility to meet the demands of one’s role in one domain due to the demands of one’s role in the other domain.
2. *Strain-based conflict* refers to role-produced strain in the one domain affecting one’s performance in another domain.
3. *Behaviour-based conflict* refers to the specific patterns of in-role behaviour being incompatible with expectations regarding another role.

Of course, work may not only interfere with home, but home also with work. Moreover, next to inter-role conflicts, there may also be positive interactions between multiple roles (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006; Van Steenbergen, Ellemers, & Mooijaart, 2007). However, as we are interested in the influence of time-spatial flexibility on work–family conflict, the focus of the present study is on the concept of Negative Work–Home Interference (Geurts et al., 2002).

### *Time-spatial flexibility*

In this section, we will focus on three well-established flexible work arrangements in the Netherlands that potentially allow employees to better harmonise work and family life, for instance, part-time work; flexible working hours or flexitime; and telehomework.

A large number of Dutch employees choose to work reduced hours, mostly, but not always, because of family reasons (Cloin & Hermans, 2006). At present, 75% of the Dutch women participating in the labour market work part time (less than 35 hours per week). Also, among male workers the percentage of part-timers is remarkably high, at 23% (Portegijs & Keuzenkamp, 2008). Female part-timers often hold small part-time jobs, and male part-timers larger part-time jobs. By definition, reduced workloads allow workers more time for activities outside the work domain. Therefore, it might be reasonable to think that part-timers will experience less negative work–home interference than full-time workers. Of course, when the workload of part-timers equals that of full-timers, working reduced hours may lead to tensions and stress (cf. Peper, Van Doorne-Huiskes, & Den Dulk, in press).

A growing number of Dutch workers have control over the temporal location of their work. In 2004, 39% of the Dutch employees were, to some extent, entitled to determine when they worked during the day. In 1994, the percentage was 26% (Fouarge et al., 2006). Flexitime allows employees to gear their working hours to the obligations they have in the private domain, which may lead to reduced levels of negative work–home interference (Anderson, Coffey, & Byerly, 2002).

In the European context, Dutch employees not only hold more voluntary part-time jobs, as telehomework is relatively common. In 2003, more than 20% of the

Dutch employees substituted part of their time at the office for time spent working at home (Gareis, 2002). However, only 9% of the Dutch employees had home working days averaging one day or more (Gareis, 2002). A more recent study of the Dutch labour union FNV conducted in 2007 confirms this relative high percentage (Beffers & Van den Brink, 2008). Telehomeworking has the potential to enable employees to find a better work–life balance. It reduces commuting time (Ory & Mokhtarian, 2007) and allows employees to control the temporal location of their work (France, Akselsen, Jones, & Tracy, 2002; Tremblay, 2002; Vittersø et al., 2003). Case and panel studies show telehomeworkers to be more satisfied with their work–life balance (Collins, 2005; Duxbury, Higgins, & Neufeld, 1998; Madsen, 2003). Some studies, however, also stress potential risks telework may involve, like working longer hours, which may enhance negative work–home interference (Baruch, 2000; European Commission, 2000; Felstead, Jewson, & Walters, 2003; Peters & Van der Lippe, 2007).

All in all, the literature shows the effect of time-spatial flexibility on work–life balance is ambiguous. Some studies do find a positive relationship between the use of flexible work arrangements and the degree to which employees experience negative work–home interference (e.g., Anderson et al., 2002). However, in other studies, such a correlation is not found (e.g., Clark, 2001; Gottlieb et al., 1998); some even find a negative relationship (Epstein & Kalleberg, 2004).

### *New Working Conditions*

Some would argue that the effect of the use of flexible arrangements on work–family conflict may depend on the characteristics of the work involved (Kossek et al., 2005). Moreover, overtime might play an important mediating role. For a particular category of workers, this may indeed be the case. The requirements of faster reactions to a globalising market in the post-war period set the trend for a new type of employee, with a greater span of control and accountability (Peters, 2000). This type of worker, Robert Reich (1992) qualified as the Symbolic Analysts, concerned with the identification and solving of problems and strategic brokering. They are specialists in the manipulation of symbols, such as data, words, oral and visual representations. Target rather than time-oriented (cf. Hochschild, 1997), they depend for their incomes on the quality, originality, cleverness, and, occasionally, speed with which they solve, identify, and broker new problems. Team working by project is critical for this type of worker. Reich (1992) estimated that in the 1990s this category accounted for about 20% of American jobs. The proportion of American workers who fit this category has increased substantially since the 1950s, but the pace of their accrual slowed considerably since the 1980s. This type of employee will be most frequent, of course, in high-pay, long-hour jobs in privately run operations active in novel markets. Also, Dutch scholars (De Korte & Bolweg, 1994; Van Hoof, 2007) have noticed the emergence of the New Employee characterised by a high level of professional autonomy and accountability on the one hand, and increased time-spatial flexibility on the other. Their working conditions are expected to spread over other job categories as well. Despite this, in the Dutch labour market traditional, more Taylorist working conditions continue to exist (Steijn, 2001; Van Hoof, 2007).

Strikingly, however, workers having flexible working conditions are shown to experience more work–family conflict than other workers (Allard, Haas, & Hwang,

2007) and consider themselves less successful in achieving a good work–life balance (e.g., Den Dulk & Peper, 2007). Note that the modernisation of employment relations has not only led to more freedom regarding work, but also to an ongoing intensification of work (Lewis & Smithson, 2006). Meanwhile, styles of control involving close supervision and disciplining have been replaced by mechanisms of internal motivation, which has made for a type of control by positive reinforcement, and for any coercive intervention to be diffuse and mediated (Peters, 2000). Moreover, with the development of information and communication technologies, teleworking, and flexworking systems, the boundaries between work and home are becoming more and more permeable, both temporally and spatially.

In view of this all, critics have stressed the ‘quasi-moral obligation’ that the contemporary discourse of flexibility may lead to. In their opinion, employees using the flexibility offered may feel that they have to reciprocate by giving their employer something else in return (Fleetwood, 2007), for instance, longer working hours (Hinrichs, Roche, & Sirianni, 1991; Hochschild, 1997; Schor, 1992; Van Echtelt, 2007). This may affect their work–life balance negatively. In fact, the New Working Conditions may also affect employees’ work–life balance directly, as their increased accountability may cause them to ponder about work also when engaged in private activities. This is especially likely when it comes to flexitime and telehomeworking. With regard to part-time work this may be less likely to occur.

### Conceptual model

Figure 1 depicts the hypothesised relationships that can be derived from the developments described above. First, it can be hypothesised that time-spatial flexibility (part-time work, flexible working hours, and telehomeworking) has the potential to reduce negative work–home interference (H1: –). Second, time-spatial flexibility (especially flexitime and telehomeworking) may leave more room for doing

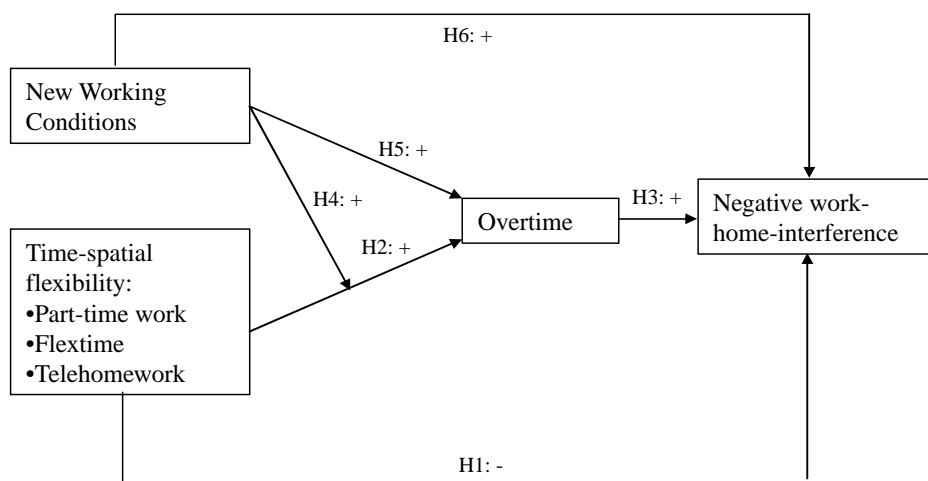


Figure 1. Conceptual model.



overtime (H2: +), and, third, through this (H3: +), it may also increase negative work-home interference. Fourth, especially with regard to employees working under New Work Conditions, time-spatial flexibility may run parallel with more overtime (H4: +), and, hence, more negative work-home interference. In fact, fifth, all employees working under the New Working Conditions can be expected to do more overtime (H5: +) and, sixth, to experience more negative work-home interference, either directly (H6: +) or indirectly through overtime (H3: +).

### *Gender differences*

In the Dutch context, there are several reasons to expect the relationships pictured in Figure 1 to vary for male and female employees (cf. Duxbury & Higgins, 1991; Madsen, 2003). Therefore, we will also estimate the model for males and females separately. Generally, Dutch women are still held primarily responsible for their households and the care for children, which is shown by the large number of part-time working women in the Netherlands. Consequently, we expect female workers to experience more practical problems during the day or week regarding the combination of work and family than male workers, which likely manifests itself in higher levels of negative work-home interference (Geurts & Demerouti, 2003). This is in line with research conducted in other countries, for instance, by Duxbury and Higgins (1991), Gutek, Searle, and Klepa (1991), and Higgins, Duxbury, and Lee (1994). Although in some studies gender differences were not found to be significant (Frone, Russell, & Cooper, 1992), in the present study, it will be tested whether in the Dutch case, female workers experience more negative work-home interference than male workers.

In addition, the motives for the use of flexible arrangements, like telehomework and flexitime, may vary by gender, which may lead to different consequences (Sullivan & Lewis, 2001). Research in various contexts shows that female workers are more likely to opt for telehomeworking to better balance work and family life, whereas this motive was not mentioned by male teleworkers (Felstead, Jewson, Phizacklea, & Walters, 2000; cf. Fouarge et al., 2004). For both Dutch men and women, however, meeting deadlines appears to be the main motive for working at home (ibid.).

## **Methodology**

### *Data*

The data used in this study were collected in 2003 by means of a multi-stage sample of Dutch employees. Organisations were approached using a variety of formal and informal contacts. The 30 participating organisations varied in size and were situated in a broad variety of sectors, covering both public and private organisations. After that, individual workers were approached with the organisations' permission and help. Employees were called at work and were asked whether they (and their spouse if applicable) would be willing to participate. If so, employees (and their spouses) were interviewed in their homes. Both written and oral fully structured questionnaires were used. The home interviews lasted for about one hour (singles) to one and a half hours (for couples). The response rate among employees was 29% ( $N = 1114$ ). The data presented in this study were drawn from the interviews with non-single employees having a labour contract for at least 12 hours per week ( $N = 807$ ); 467

were male employees (58%) and 340 were female employees (42%). We over-sampled higher educated employees.

### ***Dependent and mediating variables***

Negative work-home interference is measured through a validated subscale consisting of three items derived from the SWING questionnaire (Geurts et al., 2005) presented below. A 5-point Likert scale was used, a high score corresponding with high levels of negative work-home interference (5 = always) (Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.67$ ).

1. How often does it happen that your work schedule makes it difficult for you to fulfil your domestic obligations?
2. How often does it happen that you find it difficult to fulfil your domestic obligations because you are constantly pondering about work?
3. How often does it happen that you do not enjoy the company of your spouse/family/friends because you worry about work?

Overtime is measured by subtracting employees' contractual working hours from their actual weekly working hours. Because the overtime variable was highly skewed, its root square is used.

### ***Independent and moderating variables***

The variable New Working Conditions is measured through a scale developed by Van Echtelt (2007). Line managers were asked to indicate to what extent the work of their subordinates can be characterised by (1) professional autonomy; (2) creativity; (3) challenges/learning new things; (4) team working by project; (5) output management/targets; and (6) strict deadlines. The variables are coded such that a high score corresponds with the presence of many New Working Conditions (Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.83$ ).

Use of flexible work arrangements is measured through four single variables:

1. Small Part-Time Job measures whether the respondent has a contract for 12–24 hours per week [1 = yes].
2. Larger Part-Time Job measures whether respondent has a contract for 25–35 hours per week [1 = yes]. The reference group is those working full time ( $> 35$  contractual working hours per week).
3. Flexitime is measured through a question inquiring after the person who controls the temporal location of their working hours. Answering categories ranged from 1 = mostly someone else controls my working hours to 5 = I mostly control my working hours.
4. Telehomework was measured by a dummy variable indicating whether respondents work at home at least one day per week or not, overtime explicitly being excluded [1 = yes].

In order to see whether the effect of the use of flexible work arrangements varies across New Working Conditions, four *interaction terms* were calculated by multiplying the respondents' scores on the four time-spatial flexibility variables by their scores on the New Working Conditions variable.

### **Control variables**

Also factors representing the employees' household or demographic characteristics can be assumed to affect their perceived negative work-home interference. The following control variables are used:

*Age of the youngest child in the household:* Especially young children demand more time and energy from their parents (Blair-Loy & Wharton, 2002; Frone et al., 1992; Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Therefore, two dummy variables are used: Youngest Child under 4 [1 = yes]; and Youngest Child aged 4–12 [1 = yes], the category of employees having no children under 12 being the reference category.

*Spouse's contractual hours:* Higher numbers of spousal hours can be expected to correlate positively with negative work-home interference as experienced by the respondent.

*Educational level:* This variable is measured through nine ascending categories, higher scores corresponding with higher educational levels.

*Gender:* In order to analyse gender differences, a dichotomous variable for the respondent's gender is used [1 = female]. Moreover, in order to compare within gender groups, the model will be calculated for males and females separately.

### **Method**

Besides bivariate correlations and *t*-tests, multiple regression analyses will also be reported. As the respondents are nested within 30 organisations, in the latter analyses, a cluster correction will be used. The correlation matrix (Table 1) shows that there are no too high correlations between the independent variables in the model.

Tables 1 and 2 present our data. Notice that the average scores on the negative work-home interference variable are not very high, which means that, on average, the employees in our study do not experience very high levels of conflict. Furthermore, the tables show that especially female employees work part time. The gendered pattern of the Dutch labour market is also expressed in the relatively low average spousal working hours in the male sample.

### **Results**

#### ***Descriptive analyses***

The correlations presented in Table 1 show that negative work-home interference correlates positively with overtime, New Working Conditions, flexitime, telehomework, educational level, and the presence of a young child under 4, and negatively with part-time work. Note that flexitime and telehomework also correlate highly with the New Working Conditions (0.41 and 0.16, respectively), which may explain the positive correlations between negative work-home interference on the one hand, and flexitime and telehomework on the other. Also overtime correlates positively with New Working Conditions, flexitime, telehomework, and educational level, but negatively with part-time work, gender, presence of youngest child in the age bracket 4–12, and spousal working hours.

Table 1. Minimum score (min), maximum score (max), mean score (mean), standard deviation (SD), and bivariate correlations between the variables.

Variables	Min	Max	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1. Negative work-home interference	1	4	1.73	0.60	1											
2. Overtime	0	5.20	1.41	1.30	0.24***	1										
3. New Work Conditions	1.33	4.83	3.38	0.72	0.24***	0.38***	1									
4. Part time [1 = 12–24 p/w]	0	1	0.14	0.35	−0.15***	−0.25***	−0.33***	1								
5. Part time [1 = 25–35 p/w]	0	1	0.23	0.42	−0.02	−0.16***	0.02	−0.22***	1							
6. Flexitime	1	5	3.91	1.40	0.07*	0.25***	0.41***	−0.21***	0.04	1						
7. Telehome work [1 = yes]	0	1	0.08	0.27	0.11***	0.15***	0.16***	−0.05	−0.01	0.12***	1					
8. Gender [1 = female]	0	1	0.42	0.49	−0.06	−0.32***	−0.21***	0.37***	0.33***	−0.07*	−0.05	1				
9. Educational level	1	9	6.06	2.13	0.19***	0.35***	0.42***	−0.09**	0.08*	0.42***	0.18***	−0.06	1			
10. Youngest child <4	0	1	0.26	0.44	0.06*	0.03	0.16***	0.01	0.10*	0.09*	0.02	−0.03	0.12***	1		
11. Youngest child [4–12]	0	1	0.24	0.42	−0.01	−0.06*	−0.05	0.10**	−0.05	−0.07	−0.01	−0.07*	−0.09*	−0.33***	1	
12. Spousal hours	0	40	26.19	13.74	−0.05	−0.16***	−0.05	0.15***	0.26***	0.05	0.05	0.48***	0.07*	−0.05	−0.12***	1

\* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.001$  (one-tailed).  
Source: Time-Competition data, 2003.

Table 2. Descriptives of the variables by gender (*t*-tests).

	Men ( <i>N</i> = 467)				Women ( <i>N</i> = 340)				Mean difference	
	Min	Max	Mean	SD	Min	Max	Mean	SD	Mean	Sign
Conflict	1	4	1.76	0.61	1	4	1.68	0.57	0.08	n.s.
Overtime	0	5.20	1.76	1.31	0	4.58	0.93	1.12	0.83	***
New Working Conditions	1.33	4.83	3.52	0.65	1.33	4.83	3.21	0.79	0.31	***
Part-time work [12–24]	0	1	0.11	0.32	0	1	0.29	0.45	–0.26	***
Part-time work [25–35]	0	1	0.03	0.17	0	1	0.40	0.49	–0.29	***
Flexitime	1	5	4.00	1.34	1	5	3.79	1.46	0.21	***
Telehomework	0	1	0.09	0.29	0	1	0.07	0.25	0.03	n.s.
Educational level	1	9	6.12	2.18	1	9	5.92	2.05	0.25	*
Spousal working hours	0	40	20.59	13.09	0	40	33.87	10.54	–13.28	***
Y. child <4	0	1	0.27	0.45	0	1	0.25	0.43	0.03	n.s.
Y. child [4–12]	0	1	0.26	0.44	0	1	0.20	0.40	0.06	*

\**p* < 0.05; \*\**p* < 0.01; \*\*\**p* < 0.001 (one-tailed).

n.s. = non significant.

Source: Time-Competition data, 2003.

Gender (female) correlates negatively with overtime, New Working Conditions, and flexitime, and positively with part-time work and spousal working hours. Strikingly, the correlation between gender and negative work-home interference is negative, but not significant ( $-0.06$ ). A  $t$ -test (Table 2) shows that negative work-home interference is slightly higher among male employees (Mean = 1.76) than among female workers (Mean = 1.68). However, this difference is not significant.

### *Explanatory analyses*

Table 3 presents the results of the multiple regression analyses. Model 1 estimates the effects of the use of flexible work arrangements and New Working Conditions on negative work-home interference. The analyses control for the variables presented in the Methodology section, but not for the mediating variable overtime. Model 2 estimates the effects of the independent variables on overtime. Model 3 estimates the effects of the independent variables and the mediating variable overtime on negative work-home interference.

The results bearing on the whole sample (see 'All' columns in Table 3) show that part-time work and flexitime reduce negative work-home interference (Model 1). Telehomeworking, however, is not shown to affect negative work-home interference significantly.

In Models 2 and 3 the mediating effect of overtime is analysed. In line with our expectations working overtime enhances employees' perceptions of negative work-home interference (Model 3). Flexitime, however, does not affect overtime (Model 2). Part-timers experience lower levels of conflict, which can partly be attributed to them working less overtime (Models 2 and 3). Telehomeworkers are shown to perform more overtime (Model 2). However, Models 1, 2, and 3 indicate that the conditions for mediation are not met.

New Working Conditions coincide with more overtime and negative work-home interference (Models 2 and 3). In contrast to our expectations, the interactions between New Working Conditions and the use of flexible work arrangements are not significant (interaction effects not presented in Table 3).

Compared to their male colleagues, female Dutch workers are shown to experience more conflict regarding the combination of work and family life, keeping constant for their working conditions and their demographic and household characteristics (Models 1 and 3). Male workers appear to do more overtime than their female peers (Model 2). Generally speaking, higher educated workers experience higher levels of conflict than their lower educated equivalents. Partly, this can be attributed to them doing more overtime (Models 2 and 3). Spousal hours reduce overtime (Model 2). Finally, having young children enhances negative work-home interference (Models 1 and 3).

Among male workers only (see columns Men in Table 3), telehomeworking runs parallel with more overtime (Model 2). However, it cannot be shown that telehomework causes men to experience more negative work-home interference (Models 1 and 3), although overtime enhances men's work-family conflict (Model 3). Men having a smaller part-time job experience less conflict than full-time working men (Models 1 and 3), partly mediated by them performing less overtime (Model 2). Men having a larger part-time job, however, do not experience less conflict between work and family life (Models 1 and 3), despite them working less overtime compared

Table 3. Unstandardised partial regression coefficients (*b*) of New Working Conditions and time-spatial flexibility on overtime and negative work-home interference by gender ( $N=776$ ;  $N_{\text{men}}=446$ ;  $N_{\text{women}}=329$ ).

	Negative work-home interference Model 1			Overtime Model 2			Negative work-home interference Model 3		
	All	Men	Women	All	Men	Women	All	Men	Women
Gender	0.11*	—	—	−0.33**	—	—	0.13**	—	—
Overtime	—	—	—	—	—	—	0.07***	0.07***	0.05
New Working Conditions	0.14***	0.20***	0.09*	0.33***	0.38***	0.29***	0.12**	0.17***	0.07
Part time [12–24]	−0.25***	−0.37**	−0.25**	−0.50**	−0.76*	−0.39*	−0.22***	−0.31*	−0.24**
Part time [25–35]	−0.12*	−0.15	0.08	−0.47***	−0.51**	−0.39**	−0.09*	−0.11	0.07
Flexitime	−0.04**	−0.03	−0.06**	0.03	−0.00	0.08*	−0.05**	−0.03	−0.06**
Telehomework	0.14	0.21	0.03	0.30*	0.39**	0.16	0.12	0.18	0.02
Educational level	0.04***	0.03**	0.06***	0.16***	0.16***	0.16***	0.03**	0.02	0.05***
Y. child <4	0.08*	0.08	0.05	−0.11	0.06	−0.22	0.09*	0.09	0.06
Y. child [4–12]	0.04	−0.00	0.08	−0.13	−0.10	−0.18	0.05	0.00	0.09
Spousal hours	−0.00	−0.00	0.00	−0.01*	−0.00	−0.01*	−0.00	−0.00	0.00
Intercept	1.14***	1.07***	1.30***	−0.23	−0.36	−0.55	1.20***	1.10***	1.31***
Adj. $R^2$ in%	9.8%	10.5%	10.8%	28.8%	17.2%	30.0%	11.3%	12.4%	11.7%

\* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \* $p < 0.001$  (one-tailed).

—=variable not entered in the model.

Source: Time-Competition data, 2003.

to full-timers (Model 2). Flexitime affects neither men's overtime (Model 2), nor the level of work–family conflict they experience (Models 1 and 3).

Men working under New Working Conditions experience more negative work–home interference than men working under more traditional conditions (Model 1). This is partly mediated by overtime (Models 2 and 3). Also in these analyses, the interactions between the presence of New Working Conditions and the use of flexible work arrangements are not significant (interaction effects not presented).

Among Dutch male workers, the presence of young children does not affect overtime or work–family conflict. Educational level only affects negative work–home interference through overtime.

Looking into the sub-sample of female workers (see 'Women' columns in Table 3), telehomeworking affects neither overtime (Model 2), nor work–family conflict (Models 1 and 3). Female employees having flexitime, however, work more overtime (Model 2). At the same time, however, flexitime coincides with female workers experiencing less negative work–home interference (Models 1 and 3). Women holding smaller part-time jobs perform less overtime (Model 2), and experience lower levels of negative work–home interference (Models 1 and 3). Women holding larger part-time jobs do not experience lower levels of conflict than full-time working women (Models 1 and 3), despite them working less overtime (Model 2).

Women working under New Working Conditions perform more overtime than other women (Model 2). Strikingly, however, overtime does not affect women's perception of negative work–home interference (Model 3). Moreover, the results do not indicate that women working under New Working Conditions experience more conflict when the analyses are controlled for overtime (Model 3).

Higher educated women work more overtime and perceive more negative work–home interference (Models 1 and 3). Longer spousal hours coincide with women working less overtime (Model 2). However, they do not affect women's work–family conflict (Models 1 and 3).

## Discussion and conclusion

Generally, it is assumed that forms of '*employee-friendly*' flexibility, like part-time work, flexitime, and telehomeworking, improve employees' work–life balance. It can be questioned whether this really is the case, and if so, whether this also holds for the category of workers in the Netherlands working under New Working Conditions. Critics state that time-spatial flexibility is not as family friendly as it seems. Rather, the flexibility offered to employees may cause them to work overtime. Consequently, they may face more negative work–home interference. This may especially be the case when it concerns New Employees.

Our results show that our respondents, on average, do not experience high levels of negative work–home interference. However, this does not imply that the work–life balance problem does not cause many problems in Dutch society. Our analyses show that some categories of workers experience more conflict than others.

Generally, the category of New Employees experience more negative work–home interference than other employees, which can partly be attributed to the higher levels of overtime this category performs. However, besides working more overtime, the increased accountability may also cause the workers to ponder about work during their own or family time, which negatively affects the quality of their leisure and



family time. These results support the more critical perspectives on the modernisation of employment relations. At the same time, however, our research also supports the hypothesis stating that de-standardisation of work will improve employees' work-life balance. Our Dutch case study shows that giving employees more control over work (flexitime and part-time work) reduces employees' perceptions of negative work-home interference, working conditions that are often associated with New Ways to Work. Moreover, these effects of flexibility are also present under New Working Conditions. The reported concern that flexibility in combination with New Working Conditions will rather enhance work-family conflict was not supported by our study.

With regard to telehomeworking, our results were not very straightforward. Our informed guess is that telehomework engenders both conflict reducing mechanisms and conflict enhancing mechanisms. On the one hand, telehomeworkers work more overtime, although the conditions for mediation in the relationship between telehomework and work-home conflict were not met. Possibly, telehomeworking allows employees to better meet demands at home, which reduces their perceptions of work-home conflict. The relationship between telehomeworking and work-family conflict, however, needs further exploration.

Our finding with regard to men's average higher levels of work-family conflict fits in with the typical Dutch labour market situation in which most women do not participate in the labour market or hold (smaller) part-time jobs, which enables women (and men) to combine work and family life in a relatively relaxed way. On the other hand, the multiple regression analyses show that female employees do experience more work-home conflict than their male equivalents, which may be attributed to the fact that women still are held or feel primarily responsible for their household management and the care for children.

The separate analyses for men and women, respectively, show that time-spatial flexibility affects women in a different way than men. Among female workers, both smaller part-time work and flexitime are shown to be solutions to some of the work-life balance issue. In particular, flexitime appears to be a neutral arrangement, as it not only reduces female workers' perceptions of negative work-home interference, but also commits them to work overtime, albeit without affecting their balance negatively. Among men, only smaller part-time jobs reduce their conflict. Flexitime does not reduce men's work-family conflict, possibly because in most cases Dutch women face the larger part of the daily practical problems associated with taking children to school or to leisure activities. In both sub-samples, the effect of telehomework on negative work-home interference is not clear, although telehomeworking coincides with men working more overtime.

### ***Policy implications***

Our study showed that both men and women holding smaller part-time jobs experienced less negative work-home interference. However, current Dutch labour market policies are geared at stimulating especially this labour market category to allocate more time to the labour market. Through the establishment of the *Task Force Labour Plus* in 2008, for instance, the Dutch government wants to examine under what conditions part-timers are willing to increase their number of labour market hours. However, based on our findings, it is likely that an extension of

part-timers' contractual hours will affect aspects of their work-life balance negatively. Up until now, most Dutch (female) workers have chosen to hold a smaller part-time job. In fact, they do not seem to be prepared to trade in their current situation for more financial independence, extended employment, or more challenging work, for example. However, the present and future labour market shortages mean that both the Dutch government and organisations have to anticipate the work conditions demanded by workers. The study of Cloin and Hermans (2006) shows that most women, for example, are prepared to allocate more time to the labour market only under particular conditions. These conditions do not necessarily relate to more access to childcare arrangements, but concern primarily the extension of time-spatial flexibility, for instance, flexitime and telehomework.

The present study shows that especially women gain from more control over the temporal location of their work. The effects of telehomeworking on employees' work-life balance are not clear yet. They deserve more attention, especially since employee and employer representatives at the national level have chosen telework to be one of their main topics in future policies and collective labour agreements. In particular, trade unions should be concerned with the potential risks associated with telehomework, since this type of flexibility often runs parallel with New Working Conditions, and therefore, a rise of overtime and associated negative work-home interference. This might not be problematic in the short term, but may have negative consequences for employees' well-being in the long run. The current challenge for HR managers is to offer working conditions that meet the demands of especially younger labour market generations for more autonomy and flexibility, meanwhile taking their demand for more work-life balance into account. Therefore, they have to find strategies to reduce the negative effects that New Working Conditions, as they are implemented presently, may have.

### Notes on contributors

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